DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 997 CS 512 526

AUTHOR	Smith, Carl B., Ed.
TITLE	Pre- and Post-Reading Strategies for Fiction. ERIC Topical Bibliography and Commentary.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Institute of Education Sciences (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	TBC-030020
PUB DATE	2003-12-00
NOTE	6p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0028
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication, 2805 E. 10th St., #140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698. Web site: http://reading.indiana.edu.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- ERIC Publications (071) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Class Activities; Elementary Secondary Education; English Instruction; *Fiction; Instructional Effectiveness; *Literature Appreciation; Literature Reviews; *Reading Strategies

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that incorporating both pre-reading and post-reading activities into the English curriculum contributes to a more successful reading experience for students of all ages and backgrounds. The primary advantage of using either (or both) strategies is that they actively involve students in what they are reading and studying, enhancing both comprehension and appreciation of what is being read. This topical bibliography and commentary discusses research that demonstrates the value and impact of these strategies and summarizes activities that stress active communication between the reader and the writer. (Contains 16 references and 6 Internet addresses.) (RS)

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Pre- and Post-Reading Strategies for Fiction

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Introduction

Research indicates that incorporating both pre-reading and post-reading activities into the English curriculum contributes to a more successful reading experience for students of all ages and backgrounds (Cardoso, Resende, & Rodrigues, 2002; Denner, Rickards, & Albanese, 2002; Karolides, 2000; Walton & Walton, 2002; Wood, 2002). The primary advantage of using either (or both) strategies is that they actively involve students in what they are reading and studying, enhancing both comprehension and appreciation of what is being read. Classroom discussions are enhanced, achievement scores get higher, and students begin to understand the relevance of literature to their own lives.

The Value and Impact of Pre-Reading Strategies

Pre-reading activities are developed on the premise that the reader's response and activation of prior knowledge are key components to the development of the increased comprehension and appreciation of literature (Denner et al., 2002). There are a variety of pre-reading strategies currently being suggested. Bauso (1988) states that the reader's "behind-the-eye" information often contributes more to comprehension than do the words on the page. Researchers have established that the words on the page don't lead to comprehension in and of themselves, but instead hook into or activate networks of knowledge in the reader's head. The implication of these findings is that teachers of literature need to build on or activate the knowledge that students bring to the text. Suggested pre-reading activities include (1) making students aware of text structures; (2) working on the vocabulary they will encounter; (3) presenting some information on potentially confusing actions, characters, or setting; (4) commenting on key words, images, or themes; (5) reading aloud to students to give them a sense of the sound and flow of the language; and (6) helping them anticipate what will happen in a reading assignment (13). Bauso states that prior preparation enables students to have a more successful reading experience—by building or activating knowledge, by arousing expectations, by creating a purpose to read beyond just the teacher assignment, by directing them in what to concentrate on in general, and by making them more actively involved in the reading (14).

Building on the research he has done in the past, (Denner et al., 2002; Denner, 1990) reiterate that pre-reading activities that induce readers to activate and make connections with their prior knowledge and the text can enhance reading comprehension. Denner then notes that reading professionals have begun to focus on pre-reading activities that go beyond activating readers' pre-existing knowledge to ones that have the additional potential to enhance their knowledge once activated. Denner conducted a study using "story impressions" as a pre-reading writing activity to determine the story recall and comprehension of 96 seventh- and eighth-grade students. Results revealed that "story impressions" (clue words) when paired with composing a written story of their own (a "story-guess") produced the highest level of story comprehension and recall for both above and below average readers (21). The composing aspect of the "story impressions" with written

"story-guess" previews appears to engage students in the building of a tentative model or "rough draft" of the meaning of the text. By producing a rough draft of the text, the readers were required to use their relevant background knowledge appropriately. Once devised, the readers also had the rough draft available as a mental model to refine and adjust as they encountered the actual story. The findings suggest that "story impressions" as a pre-reading strategy may be effective because it induces students to engage in processes associated with writing as they read. Thus it helps them to see that reading, much like their own writing, is an interactive composing process (26).

Patton (1992) further examines the value of using pre-reading activation strategies to increase student achievement in literature classes. Citing his observations of his own and that of five other teachers who all used a variety of pre-reading activation strategies, Patton notes three recurring themes on pre-reading's impact in the classroom: (1) the pre-reading activities themselves provided students with overt models of a thoughtful, questioning demeanor with which to proceed into the reading. By beginning with engaging the students' prior knowledge and perceptions, teachers send the covert but definite message that good reading equals active thinking; (2) activating the students' emotions, encouraging a personal connection to the text, is an essential component of successful reading strategy; and (3) the teacher's own methodology often seemed to become more innovative as the reading unit proceeded (13-14).

Patton states that all students need a context before they read, a tie to their own experience. Pre-reading strategies might include: (1) skimming for main ideas; (2) discussing what the students already know; (3) setting a purpose (e.g. what do you want to know when you finish reading?; (4) reflecting on the teacher's goal. This kind of pre-thinking activity sets the mood for thinking and speculation, for thinking creatively, for making a personal connection to the reading material (8-9). Patton concludes that pre-writing, pre-thinking activity helps focus thematic exploration, enriches written responses, greatly improves the "comfort level" for sharing thoughts and questions, and leads to questions that are much more in-depth and sophisticated.

Maxworthy (1993) investigates the use of study guides to improve reading comprehension. Study guides are defined as a teaching aid written by the teacher to be used to assist the development of reading skills for the purpose of enhancing comprehension of textual material. In effect, the study guide provides a model of the teacher's thinking process during reading to use as a comprehension model for students, a "tutor in print", if you will (138). Two types of study guides were studied: the interlocking study guide and the noninterlocking study guide, to determine their effect on comprehension and post reading oral discussion. Findings from the study show that the comprehension test scores of students who used both interlocking and noninterlocking study guides were superior to the comprehension test scores of students who used a teacher-constructed study guide. The quality of classroom discussion was found to be significantly higher in classes that used the noninterlocking study guide than in classes that used an interlocking study guide or that used a teacher-constructed study guide (144-45). Maxworthy concludes that reading comprehension is a dynamic, interactive process of constructing meaning by combining the reader's existing knowledge with the text information within the context of the reading situation. The key elements are reader, text, and context. While study guides can be valuable tools for the enhancement of instruction, the effectiveness of any guide depends in a large part on the direction of the teacher. Study guides should be explained and modeled for students. Follow-up discussion is critical to the successful use of interlocking and noninterlocking study guides. A well-constructed study guide enables the reader to construct meaning through ongoing negotiations with the author (139). Along with the above tried and tested pre-reading approaches, some interesting ideas that have been discussed in recent literature include using "comprehension strategy gloves" (Newman, 2002), graphic organizers (Merkley & Jefferies, 2001) and creative drama (Annarella, 2000).

The Value and Impact of Post-Reading Strategies

Post-reading activities can be employed to help synthesize and consolidate what has been encountered in a text. Duke (1995) states that in most current literature series, there is still heavy emphasis upon literature as artifact, as something to be analyzed without regard for the reader's interest or involvement (282). The Mirror Series for American English teachers addresses the concerns of reader response, of building bridges between readers' prior knowledge and experiences and those to be experienced within the text. This approach to teaching literature has three components: (1) Personal Response; (2) Shared Response; and (3) Analytical Response; all designed to involve readers' personal knowledge, emotion and experience. With this approach, post-reading activities do not demand a correct or expected response. Rather, it develops a context for exploring ideas and defending alternative understandings (282). The Mirror Series aims to help students understand the relevance of literature to their lives. Readers learn to draw upon their own and past literary experiences. Some research suggests that there is considerable benefit from relating new texts to those previously encountered. Duke finds that teachers are indicating that reader-response approaches are helpful in developing increased comprehension and greater appreciation of literature. Pre-reading plans are also included in this approach.

Simpson (1995) modified a strategy called the "talk through" for high school students to help them go beyond a simple retelling of the text to transform, reorganize and elaborate information, and to monitor their own understanding. Students rehearse aloud important area concepts as if they had an audience for their private speech. Requiring the students to become involved means the content of a talk goes beyond a mere retelling of the key ideas. The benefits of this strategy are that it actively involves students in what they are reading—transforming ideas into their own words, spontaneously elaborating upon ideas can enhance the reader's understanding and recall of content area themes and concepts. The talk through must be modified to the unique characteristics of the unit objectives of each class. Simpson cites the example of a 10th grade English teacher who did several talk throughs as they read and discussed *Malcolm X*. One of the talk throughs asked students to determine the key individuals who influenced Malcolm's life and to justify their decisions (301). Most students have vague notions of what it means to understand and virtually no mechanisms for determining when they are lost. The talk through heightens students' metacognitive awareness. Once students conduct talk throughs, they can more readily identify what they do not understand and, as a result, are more likely to ask questions in class. Simpson concludes that the talk through is a flexible learning strategy that can be modified by students and teachers in the quest to learn content area concepts. The most important advantage for teachers is that students who do talk throughs become more active learners who have deeper and more elaborative understandings of concept. For secondary students the most important advantage of the talk through is that they have another way of studying that capitalizes on something they enjoy doing—talking (303).

Conclusion

Literature teachers are routinely trained to become adept at follow-up, to conduct an analysis of the already finished reading experience. The drawback to this approach is that many students become passive learners, relying on rereading and memorizing in order to understand a text. Current research supports the value of incorporating pre-reading and post-reading strategies into the design of English curriculums. The activities that have been summarized here stress the active communication between the reader and the writer. The utilization of pre-reading and/or post-reading strategies seem beneficial in enhancing students comprehension of text, improved test scores, as well as encouraging an appreciation of literature by setting the mood for thinking creatively and making a personal connection to the reading material.

Internet Resources

An overview of pre-reading and post-reading strategies from the Oregon Department. of Education
http://www.ode.state.or.us/mcauliffe/2001/prereadstrat.htm

A list of Strategies for Successful Readers and Writers from the Bank Street College
http://www.bankstreet.edu/literacyguide/strategies.html

Some quick guides/practical resources on pre-reading and post-reading activities
http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/Reynolds/teachers/blovelace/breakthru/page4.html
http://www.readin.org/class/LessonPlans/7-8/lppredur.htm
http://staff.fcps.net/drrobins/pre.htm
http://www.irc-ekits.org/PDFs/methods&strat-2/IV.%20D.%202.%20List%20of%20Reading%20Strategies.PDF

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ERIC TBC #030020 was published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication, 2805 E. 10th St., #140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698, Tel. 1-800-759-4723. Full text at: http://eric.indiana.edu. ERIC Topical Bibliography and Commentary summaries are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. This project is funded at least in part with Federal funds from the US Department of Education under contract ED-99-CO-0028. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the US Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the US Government.

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